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Trends—Consumer Attitudes and the Supermarket 1982 Update

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Table Of Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
Content of Study	1
Study Design	1
A Note on Tables	1
Survey Highlights	2
Chapter I: The General Outlook	3
Inflation, Unemployment, and Confidence in the Future	3
Anticipated Prices: Consumers Project Changes and Place the Blame	8
Chapter II: The Consumer's View of Supermarkets	10
Responsibilities of Supermarkets	10
Views of Supermarket Services	11
Ratings of Supermarket Services	13
Chapter III: Saving Time and Money	14
Methods of Economizing	14
Who are the Heavy Economizers?	16
Frequency of Economizing	17
Saving Time in the Supermarket	18
Chapter IV: Shopping Patterns	19
The Weekly Grocery Bill	19
Number of Supermarkets Used and Number of Supermarket Visits in an Average Week	21
Shopping Hours	22
Supermarkets vs. Other Stores	23
Chapter V: Consumer Activism	24
General Consumer Activism	24
Supermarket-Related Activism	25
Who Are the Most Activist Consumers?	26
Supermarket Complaint Handling	27
Chapter VI: A Comparison of Key Groups in the Shopping Public	30
Views of Supermarket Responsibilities	30
Shopping Habits	33
Methodology	37
Selection of the Sample	37
Sampling Error	40

Index of Tables

Chapter 1: The General Outlook

Table 1 Rising Prices vs. Unemployment: Which is the More Serious Problem for the Country? 1974-1982 3

Table 2 Price Inflation Today Compared To A Year Ago: 1974-1982 4

Table 3 Ease Or Difficulty In Making Ends Meet: 1978-1982 5

Table 4 How Subgroups Of The Population Compare In Their Ability To Make Ends Meet 6

Table 5 Expectations For Next Year's Personal Economic Situation: 1976-1982 7

Table 6 Price Changes Expected In Next Six Months 8

Table 7 Blame For High Food Prices: 1979-1982 9

Chapter II: The Consumer's View of Supermarkets

Table 8 What Shoppers Think Supermarkets' Responsibilities Are ... 10

Table 9 Shoppers Volunteer What They Feel Are The Two Or Three Most Important Services Supermarkets Can Provide 11

Table 10 Supermarkets And Food Safety 12

Table 11 Consumer Behavior And Food Safety 12

Table 12 Shoppers Rate Supermarket Services 13

Chapter III: Saving Time And Money

Table 13 Methods Of Economizing In Shopping And In Home Meal Planning And Preparation: 1974-1982 14

Table 14 Areas In Which Shoppers Feel They Could Economize More If They Had To 15

Table 15 Who Are the Heavy Economizers? 16

Table 16 How Often Shoppers Use Supermarket Specials, Coupons, And Price Comparisons 17

Table 17 Differences Among Key Subgroups In Frequency Of Economizing 17

Table 18 How Shoppers Save Time In The Supermarket 18

Chapter IV: Shopping Patterns

Table 19 Shoppers' Weekly Grocery Expenses: 1981-1982 19

Table 20 Average Per Person Weekly Grocery Expenses 20

Table 21 Number Of Different Supermarkets Shoppers Use: 1981-1982 21

Table 22 How Often Shoppers Go To The Supermarket In An Average Week: 1981-1982 21

Table 23 Time Of Day Shoppers Usually Go To Supermarkets: 1981-1982 22

Table 24 Types Of Stores Consumers Usually Shop In For Various Items 23

Index of Tables (Cont.)

Chapter V: Consumer Activism

Table 25 Consumers' Views On Taking Different Actions On Their Complaints 24

Table 26 Actions That Consumers Are Willing To Take: 1974-1982 25

Table 27 Actions Shoppers Have Taken On Supermarket-Related Complaints: 1981-1982 25

Table 28 Who Are The Most Activist Consumers? 26

Table 29 Number of Shoppers Who Have Had A Complaint About Their Supermarket In The Past Year 27

Table 30 Kinds Of Complaints Shoppers Have Made To Their Supermarket 27

Table 31 Shoppers' Reactions To How Specific Complaints Are Handled 28

Table 32 Shoppers' Reactions To How Store Headquarters, Food Manufacturers, And Store Managers And Owners Handle Complaints 29

Chapter VI: A Comparison Of Key Groups In The Shopping Public

Table 33 How Men, Women, and Working Women Compare In Their Views Of Supermarket Responsibilities 30

Table 34 How Different Groups Compare On The Most Important Services Supermarkets Can Provide 31

Table 35 The Most Activist Consumers' Views On Food Safety 32

Table 36 Items That Men, Women, And Working Women Usually Shop for In Supermarket 33

Table 37 How Different Groups Save Time In the Supermarket 34

Table 38 How Many Different Supermarkets Men, Women, And Working Women Use 35

Table 39 How Different Groups Compare In Number Of Supermarket Visits In An Average Week 35

Table 40 Shopping Hours Preferred By Women, Men, And Working Women 36

Methodology

Table 41 Demographic Profile Of Supermarket Shoppers 37

Table 42 Demographic Profiles Of Key Subgroups 39

Introduction

In 1974 the Food Marketing Institute initiated a series of consumer attitude surveys designed to identify the changing needs, values, and priorities of the American consumer. The present study is the eleventh in this series. *Trends* 1982 continues to track and evaluate the major issues and trends from previous years, while adding coverage of new issues that are likely to capture the attention of consumers over the next few years.

Content of Study

The major trend lines continued from the previous studies include:

- Consumers' outlook on the economy, including personal expectations and predictions for price changes in the near future;
- Attitudes about supermarket responsibilities and evaluations of their performance;
- Economizing measures in food shopping and meal preparation;
- Buying habits and shopping behavior;
- General consumer activism.

In addition to reporting on these issues of longstanding interest to the industry, 1982 *Trends* provides an update on the following topics initiated last year:

- Consumer preferences for shopping in supermarkets for particular items;
- The potential for increasing economizing measures;
- Weekly food shopping expenditures.

This year's study explores two areas in greater depth than ever before:

- Economizing in the supermarket, including frequency of use of coupons and specials and a portrait of the most economy-conscious shoppers;
- Consumer activism, including actions taken on supermarket-related complaints, evaluations of supermarket complaint-handling, and a portrait of the most activist consumers.

The survey therefore identified two groups in the population for special analysis—in terms of both who they are and how they differ from consumers as a whole:

- *Heavy Economizers:* The 14 percent of shoppers who have used for a few years, and are currently using, eight or more of fourteen different methods of economizing on food shopping and home meal planning and preparation. This group of economy-conscious shoppers is discussed in Chapters III and VI.
- *Activist Consumers:* The 5 percent of shoppers who have taken six or more of ten general actions and supermarket-related actions on complaints about products, stores, or services. This group of the most activist consumers is discussed in Chapters V and VI.

Other key consumer groups considered in the analysis include:

- Women, both working and nonworking;
- Men, including male principal shoppers.

A special comparison of these key groups in the shopping public appears in Chapter VI of this report. A demographic profile of the total sample, with weighted and unweighted percentages, appears at the end of this report in the Methodology section. The full questionnaire may be obtained on request from Food Marketing Institute.

Study Design

The data for this survey are based on telephone interviews with a representative nationwide sample of 1,003 male and female shoppers conducted in January 1982. The sample was controlled to consist of 60 percent female and 40 percent male heads of households, and was then weighted to a 79 percent female-21 percent male ratio to maintain comparability with previous studies in the Trends series.

A Note on Tables

Presented directly beneath the title of each table is a description of the *base;* that is, the group of respondents of whom the question was asked. The exact number of respondents in this base group, either in total or as broken out into subgroups, is provided for all nontrend tables. The percentages shown in each table are calculated on this base number. It should be noted that these percentages may not always add up to 100 percent because of rounding or the acceptance of multiple responses.

For each table, the wording of the question as it was asked this year is provided; any changes in wording from previous years are noted on the table.

Survey Highlights

The following is an overview and summary of the most important findings of *Trends* 1982.

1. *Consumer recognition of unemployment as a serious problem for the country has increased considerably in the past year.* Today a 63-24 percent majority—the strongest since attitudes on the subject were first tracked nine years ago—think that unemployment poses a more serious problem for the country than rising prices. Just one year ago, consumers felt that unemployment was the more serious problem by a narrower 50-37 percent.

2. *Many consumers believe that the sharp price increases of the last few years have leveled off.* Slightly less than half (45 percent) of consumers feel that prices in general are rising more rapidly than last year; 29 percent feel that they are rising about as rapidly, and 14 percent feel that prices are continuing to rise, but at a less rapid rate than they were last year. Very few consumers feel that prices are staying the same (9 percent), and virtually no one feels that they are going down (1 percent). Last year, a significantly higher 72 percent felt that prices were rising more rapidly than they had the year before.

3. *While most consumers report having greater difficulty in meeting their personal budgets, the number of consumers saying this has declined significantly since 1981.* A majority of consumers (60 percent) are having greater difficulty than they did last year in meeting their personal budget, and fully one-quarter (25 percent) expect their personal economic situation to worsen in the next year. However, in 1981 fully 68 percent said that they were having a harder time making ends meet.

4. *Inflationary expectations for supermarket prices have fallen since 1981.* While 30 percent of consumers anticipate that supermarket prices will get a good deal more expensive or rise sharply in the next six months, significantly more consumers (42 percent) expected them to rise at that rate last year. Similarly, consumers expect moderate increases in restaurant prices in the next six months, and nearly one-quarter (22 percent) anticipate that restaurant prices will stay the same or get a little cheaper.

The item expected to have the sharpest increase is the cost of utilities; 57 percent of consumers think that utilities will get a good deal more expensive or rise sharply in the next six months.

5. *Consumers are reluctant to single out anyone to blame for high food prices today.* Almost half of consumers (44 percent) don't blame anyone in particular for high food prices. As in previous years, consumers who do hold someone responsible blame the government most frequently, while virtually no consumers blame the supermarkets or food manufacturers for high food prices.

6. *As consumers struggle against rising prices, they continue to employ a variety of methods of economizing at the food store and at home.* The three methods of economizing used by the largest numbers of shoppers are: stocking up when they find a bargain (78 percent); making use of price-off coupons (73 percent); and buying store brands and lower price brands (72 percent).

In the home, doing more with leftovers (79 percent) and meal planning (66 percent) are the two most popular ways of cutting back on food bills.

7. *Most consumers feel that supermarkets have achieved a high level of performance in customer services.* Services receiving the highest ratings from shoppers are providing a wide variety of items for "one-stop" shopping (96 percent of consumers who feel that supermarkets are responsible for this service say that their supermarket does an excellent or pretty good job of providing it), making shopping easier and pleasurable (94 percent), assuring that customers get good service from employees (93 percent), and providing fresh, unspoiled products (93 percent).

8. *Consumers most frequently identify low prices, fast checkout, and a wide selection of products as the most important services for a supermarket to provide.*

9. *Consumers are concerned about food safety and feel that supermarkets should play an active role in protecting and informing the consumer.* Most shoppers (80 percent) believe that some ingredients in processed foods may be unsafe to eat, and virtually all (94 percent) feel that products should carry cautionary labels for ingredients thought to be unsafe. Moreover, 84 percent of consumers agree that supermarkets should refuse to carry allegedly unsafe products. On the other hand 89 percent agree that the food in supermarkets is safe to eat.

10. *Although most consumers shop in supermarkets for a wide variety of items, many prefer nonfood or specialty stores for certain items.* Supermarkets are the clear outlet preference for milk and eggs (91 percent), bread (88 percent), soft drinks (86 percent), and paper goods (61 percent); they also attract sizable numbers of customers for magazines (37 percent) and health and beauty aids (23 percent). However, all-purpose drugstores offer stiff competition for prescription drugs, health and beauty aids, and greeting cards, while discount department stores are the preferred choice for household repair and houseware items.

11. *Consumers' willingness to take actions such as writing letters to congressmen, joining organized consumer boycotts, or getting neighbors to sign petitions continues to decline.* Moreover, except for refusing to buy products that cost too much (up 5 points from last year), a decline is also apparent in supermarket-related activism. Nonetheless, fair numbers of shoppers have recently returned products for a refund or exchange in the past year (53 percent) and have made an in-person complaint to a food store or supermarket manager (33 percent).

Chapter I: The General Outlook

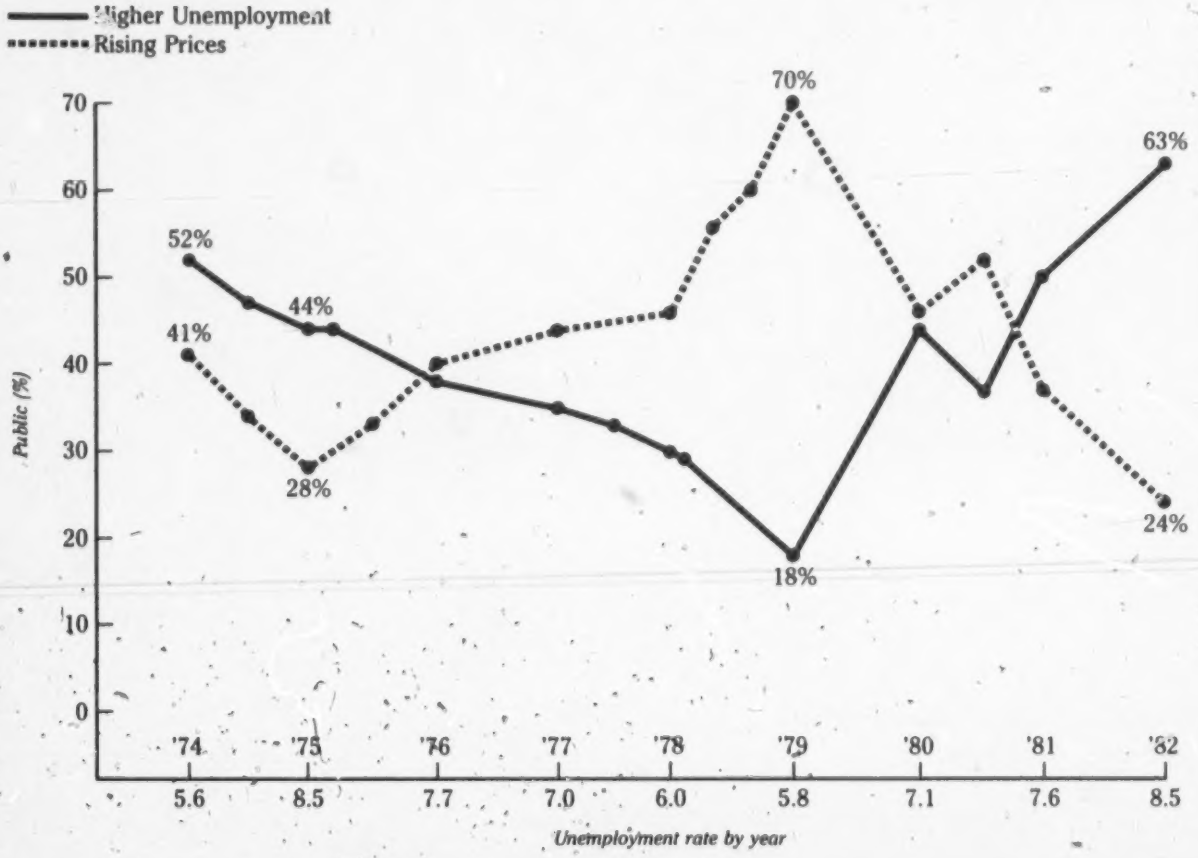
Inflation, Unemployment, and Confidence in the Future

As the national unemployment rate continued to rise in 1981 and early 1982, public recognition of unemployment as a serious problem for the country increased considerably. A strong 63-24 percent majority of Americans now think that unemployment poses a more serious problem for the country than rising prices. This is an impressive 13-point increase over the number of Americans who felt that way just one year ago. Seven years ago, when the national unemployment rate reached a postwar high of 9 percent in May 1975, a significantly smaller 44 percent felt that higher unemployment was the more serious problem.

Table 1 **Rising Prices Vs. Unemployment: Which Is The More Serious Problem For The Country? 1974-1982**

Base: The Total Public And The Shopping Public*

Q.: If you had to choose, which do you think would be a more serious problem for the country—rising prices or higher unemployment?



*Data presented for 1981 and 1982 are from the sample of shoppers used for the supermarket trends survey. All trend data prior to 1981 are from the Harris survey of national cross sections of the adult public 18 years of age and older.

If one considers this overwhelming identification of unemployment as the more serious of the two problems, it is perhaps not surprising to find a dramatic difference in consumers' perceptions of price inflation in the last year. For the first time since 1976, less than half of consumers (45 percent) believe that prices are rising more rapidly now than they were a year ago. This figure is 27 points below last year's (72 percent) and represents a 34-point decline since 1974. While virtually all consumers perceive that prices are continuing to rise, many evidently believe that the sharp increases of the last few years have leveled off.

Table 2 **Price Inflation Today Compared To A Year Ago: 1974-1982**

Base: The Total Public And The Shopping Public**

Q.: Do you think that the prices of most things you buy are rising more rapidly than a year ago, about as rapidly as they were then, rising but less rapidly than a year ago, staying the same, or are prices going down?

	Total						
	June 1974	Mar. 1976	July 1978	Mar. 1980	Jan. 1981	Jan. 1982	Net Difference 1974-1982
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Rising more rapidly	79	41	74	80	72	45	-34
Rising about as rapidly	14	22	14	13	21	29	+15
Rising but less rapidly	3	22	4	4	3	14	+11
Staying the same	3	12	6	3	3	9	+6
Going down	*	2	1	*	*	1	+1
Not sure	1	1	1	*	1	2	+1

*Less than 0.5%.

**Data presented for 1981 and 1982 are from the sample of shoppers used for the supermarket trends surveys. All trend data prior to 1981 are from the Harris survey of national cross sections of the adult public 18 years of age and older.

To turn to a more personal view of the economy, 3 out of 5 consumers say that they are now having greater difficulty than they did last year in meeting their personal budget. While this figure is undeniably high, there is some indication that consumers may be having a slightly less difficult time in making ends meet this year. The number of consumers reporting that they are finding it harder to make ends meet is 8 points below what it was last year, and is the lowest it has been in four years. Finding it harder to make ends meet is more common among those with children, the less educated, Hispanics, and residents of small towns. At the same time, one-third of consumers (34 percent) have not experienced much change in their personal economic situation—up from 28 percent last year.

Table 3 **Ease Or Difficulty In Making Ends Meet: 1978-1982**

Base: The Total Public And The Shopping Public*

Q.: Compared to a year ago, are you and your family finding it harder to make ends meet in your personal budget, easier, or has there not been much change?

	Total					
	Sept. 1978	Feb. 1979	Mar. 1980	Jan. 1981	Jan. 1982	Net Difference 1978-1982
	%	%	%	%	%	
Harder to make ends meet	55	65	67	68	60	+5
Easier	8	5	4	4	6	-2
Not much change	36	27	29	28	34	-2
Not sure	1	1	1	1	1	-

*Data presented for 1981 and 1982 are from the sample of shoppers used for the supermarket trends surveys. All trend data prior to 1981 are from the Harris survey of national cross sections of the adult population 18 years of age and older.

Table 4

How Subgroups Of The Population Compare In Their Ability To Make Ends Meet

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: Compared to a year ago, are you and your family finding it harder to make ends meet in your personal budget, easier, or has there not been much change?

	Base		Harder	Easier	Not Much Change	Not Sure
Total	1003	%	60	6	34	1
Type of family						
With children	426	%	62	8	30	-
No children	563	%	57	4	37	2
Two Wage Earners	276	%	48	8	44	-
Size of family						
1	137	%	63	7	27	3
2	357	%	55	2	41	2
3-4	333	%	60	8	32	-
5 and over	133	%	67	8	25	-
Income						
$ 7,500 or less	111	%	76	1	21	2
$ 7,501—$15,000	165	%	65	4	28	2
$15,001—$25,000	265	%	61	7	32	-
$25,001—and over	333	%	47	9	43	-
Education						
High school or less	564	%	66	5	28	*
Some college and college graduate	433	%	50	7	42	2
Region						
East	265	%	59	5	35	1
Midwest	264	%	61	7	32	1
South	289	%	60	5	34	*
West	185	%	58	7	33	2
Size of place						
City	285	%	56	6	36	2
Suburb	277	%	58	6	34	1
Town	165	%	66	3	30	1
Rural	276	%	60	7	33	*
Race						
White	503	%	56	6	38	1
Black	139	%	58	6	35	1
Hispanic	361	%	66	6	28	1

*Less than 0.5%.

However, when consumers predict their personal economic future, they are not generally optimistic about their situation improving in the next year. As in previous years, more consumers expect their economic prospects to remain the same in the coming months (43 percent) than to improve (28 percent), while fully one-quarter (25 percent) expect their personal economic situation to worsen. Since 1976, the number of Americans who feel optimistic that their economic situation will improve has declined 2 points from 30 to 28 percent, while the number expecting it to worsen has increased a total of 14 points, from 11 to 25 percent.

Table 5 **Expectations For Next Year's Personal Economic Situation: 1976-1982**

Base: The Total Public And The Shopping Public*

Q.: Looking at the situation personally, do you think your own economic situation will improve in the next year, get worse, or remain about the same?

	Total						
	Aug. 1976	Feb. 1977	Feb. 1979	Mar. 1980	Jan. 1981	Jan. 1982	Net Difference 1976-1982
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Improve	30	41	26	24	28	28	-2
Get worse	11	12	26	29	26	25	+14
Remain about the same	53	43	45	45	40	43	-10
Not sure	6	4	3	2	5	4	-2

*Data presented for 1981 and 1982 are from the sample of shoppers used for the supermarket trends surveys. All trend data prior to 1981 are from the Harris survey of national cross sections of the adult public 18 years of age and older.

Anticipated Prices: Consumers Project Changes and Place the Blame

When asked to predict what will happen to the prices of various items in the next six months, consumers overall do not anticipate that prices will get any cheaper or even stay the same. For five of the six items asked about, fewer than 1 in 10 consumers think that prices will go down, while majorities think that all six items will get more expensive.

Here again, inflationary expectations are substantially lower than in 1981, particularly for gasoline (down from 70 to 23 percent). The number of consumers expecting supermarket prices to increase a great deal sharply fell from 42 to 30 percent over the last twelve months.

The item anticipated to have the sharpest increase this year is the cost of utilities; 57 percent of consumers think that utilities will get a good deal more expensive or rise sharply in the next six months. However, consumers anticipate more moderate increases in the cost of housing (28 percent) and in gasoline prices (23 percent). Indeed, it is noteworthy that 12 percent think the cost of housing will get a little cheaper and 8 percent say the same about gasoline prices; no more than 4 percent feel that any other item will get cheaper in the next six months.

As far as supermarket prices are concerned, 30 percent of shoppers think that they will get a good deal more expensive or rise sharply, 54 percent think they will get a little more expensive, and 13 percent think they will stay the same or get a little cheaper. Shoppers predict even more moderate increases in restaurant prices, with nearly one-quarter (22 percent) anticipating that restaurant prices will stay the same or get a little cheaper. Last year when this question was asked, significantly more shoppers anticipated that supermarket prices and restaurant prices would increase a good deal or rise sharply (42 and 35 percent, respectively). Evidently, fewer consumers anticipate paying greatly increased food prices in the first half of 1982 than did for the same period of 1981.

Table 6 **Price Changes Expected In Next Six Months**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: What do you personally think will happen to (READ EACH ITEM) in the next six months—will it get a little cheaper, stay the same, get a little more expensive, get a good deal more expensive, or rise sharply?

		Jan. 1981	Jan. 1982				
Base: 1001		A Good Deal More Expensive/ Rise Sharply	A Good Deal More Expensive/ Rise Sharply	A Little More Expensive	Stay The Same	A Little Cheaper	Not Sure
The cost of utilities	%	x	57	35	6	1	2
Supermarket prices	%	42	30	54	10	3	3
The cost of housing	%	x	28	29	26	12	6
Gasoline prices	%	70	23	38	25	8	6
The price of clothing	%	34	21	45	25	4	5
Restaurant prices	%	35	17	53	20	2	7

x = Not asked in 1981.

Consumers, even more so than last year, are reluctant to single out anyone to blame for high food prices today. Almost half (44 percent) of consumers say that they don't blame anyone in particular for high food prices. The government (14 percent) and middlemen (10 percent), as in previous years, are most frequently cited as being responsible, while very few shoppers blame supermarkets (2 percent) or food manufacturers (1 percent).

Table 7 **Blame For High Food Prices: 1979-1982**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: Whom do you blame the most for high food prices today—or don't you blame anyone?

	Total				
	Feb. 1979	Feb. 1980	Jan. 1981	Jan. 1982	Net Difference 1979-1982
	%	%	%	%	
No one	39	40	37	44	+5
The government/the president	27	23	21	14	-13
Middlemen	12	8	13	10	-2
The economy/inflation	x	x	x	5	x
The unions	6	3	3	4	-2
Supermarkets	2	1	3	2	-
The public itself	6	4	6	2	-4
Farmers	1	*	1	1	-
The weather	x	x	x	1	x
Oil companies	-	2	1	1	+1
Wholesalers	*	2	1	1	+1
Food manufacturers	1	2	3	1	-
Other	11	12	11	5	-6
Not sure	x	x	x	10	x

*Less than 0.5%.

x = In previous years, included in "Other."

Chapter II: The Consumer's View Of Supermarkets

Responsibilities of Supermarkets

As in previous years, shoppers see a broad range of responsibilities for supermarkets. Virtually all shoppers feel that supermarkets are responsible for making sure their employees give good service to customers (98 percent), getting customers through checkout quickly (97 percent), and having readable and accurate shelf tags (95 percent). Other services ranking high on shoppers' lists of supermarket responsibilities are making shopping easier and more pleasurable and providing fresh, unspoiled products (90 percent each). Shoppers are evenly divided as to whether or not supermarkets are responsible for helping consumers pick the best value for their dollar, and only one-third expect supermarkets to provide nutrition and health information.

On the whole, shoppers from different regions of the country are essentially in agreement on supermarket responsibilities, with two noteworthy exceptions: more shoppers in the Midwest than in any other region of the country feel that supermarkets are responsible for keeping their favorite products in stock and for providing health and nutrition information.

Also worth noting is that shoppers who spend the most on groceries each week are most likely to feel that supermarkets are responsible for making shopping easier and more pleasurable (94 vs. 90 percent overall).

Table 8 **What Shoppers Think Supermarkets' Responsibilities Are**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: Do you feel that supermarkets are responsible for (READ EACH ITEM) or don't you feel that's their job?

		Weekly Food Shopping Basket				Region			
	Total	$40 or Less	$41-$60	$61-$100	$101 And Over	East	Mid West	South	West
Base	1003	301	253	311	84	265	264	289	185
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Supermarkets are responsible for:									
Making sure their employees give good service to their customers	98	97	98	99	98	97	100	98	98
Getting you through checkout quickly	97	96	97	97	95	95	97	97	97
Having readable and accurate shelf tags	95	95	92	97	95	94	97	93	96
Making sure you don't buy old, stale, or spoiled products	90	91	92	91	90	89	93	90	90
Making shopping easier and more pleasurable	90	90	90	88	94	89	89	92	88
Keeping your favorite products in stock	88	92	85	91	88	83	93	90	88
Helping you by having a wide variety of items for "one-stop" shopping	81	83	82	81	83	83	82	81	78
Providing you with cheaper house brands or unbranded products	79	80	77	83	81	77	83	79	78
Helping you save your money with their specials	78	78	81	76	79	77	81	79	72
Helping you pick the best value for the money	49	50	47	50	45	47	48	50	51
Providing nutrition and health information	34	42	27	34	31	32	40	33	28

Views of Supermarket Services

This year, shoppers were asked to name the two or three *most important* services a supermarket can provide. The three most frequently mentioned services are good or low prices (33 percent), fast checkout (30 percent), and a wide variety of products (27 percent). Other services numbering among the most important are courteous, friendly employees and good service (both 18 percent), and store cleanliness, well-stocked shelves, and quality products (15 percent each). Smaller proportions of shoppers mention specific product-related services; 13 percent mention fresh products in general, 12 percent mention fresh fruits and vegetables, and 8 percent mention good or better fresh meat. It is interesting to note that although virtually all shoppers hold supermarkets responsible for making sure customers receive good service and for providing readable and accurate shelf tags, relatively few shoppers mention these services as being among the most important (18 and 8 percent, respectively). However, one service in which shoppers show consistent interest and concern is a fast and efficient checkout system.

Table 9

Shoppers Volunteer What They Feel Are The Two Or Three Most Important Services Supermarkets Can Provide

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: What do you think are the two or three most important services your supermarket can provide? What else?

		Age				
	Total	18-24 Years	25-39 Years	40-49 Years	50-64 Years	65 And Over
Base	1002	73	384	148	267	123
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Good/low prices	33	41	36	37	30	18
Fast checkout	30	23	32	23	37	22
Variety, wide selection	27	36	33	27	19	21
Courteous/friendly employees	18	19	19	23	16	17
Good service	18	19	17	20	16	19
Clean store, cleanliness	15	21	16	12	17	14
Keep shelves well stocked	15	12	14	20	15	17
Quality products	15	15	15	10	18	19
Fresh products	13	11	13	16	13	10
Fresh produce/fruits and vegetables	12	10	10	14	13	10
Items on sale, money saving specials	10	22	10	14	5	6
Items well marked/ clearly marked for price	8	5	9	6	9	9
Good/better/fresh meat	8	5	10	5	10	6
Grocery carryout service	4	8	3	5	4	6
Better store hours, longer hours	2	1	3	2	2	-
Have advertised items in stock	2	-	1	3	2	2
No old/stale products	2	4	2	*	1	*
Coupons	1	2	2	-	1	-
All other	6	4	7	4	7	6
Not sure/no answer	4	5	4	3	3	8

*Less than 0.5%

In the area of food safety, shoppers clearly feel that supermarkets should play an active role in protecting and informing the consumer. A strong majority of shoppers (84 percent) agree that supermarkets should refuse to carry allegedly unsafe products. In addition, virtually all shoppers (94 percent) feel that products should carry cautionary labels for ingredients thought to be unsafe, and most shoppers (80 percent) express concern that some ingredients found in processed foods may be harmful or unsafe to eat. Moreover, shoppers indicate that their concern over potentially harmful ingredients in foods affects their shopping behavior. About 3 out of 4 shoppers say that they pay a good deal of attention to the lists of ingredients on food labels (75 percent) and avoid buying foods that they think may be harmful or unsafe.

Notwithstanding the level of concern about food safety, the overwhelming majority (89 percent) believe that the food in supermarkets is safe.

Table 10 **Supermarkets And Food Safety**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly.

Base: 1003		Strongly and Somewhat Agree	Strongly and Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure
Products should carry cautionary labels for allegedly unsafe ingredients	%	94	4	2
The food in supermarkets is safe to eat	%	89	9	2
Supermarkets should refuse to carry allegedly unsafe products	%	84	13	3

Table 11 **Consumer Behavior And Food Safety**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: The following are statements that other people have made. For each one, please tell me how close it comes to describing you—very close, somewhat close, not very close, or not at all.

Base: 1003		Very Close	Somewhat Close	Not Very Close	Not At All	Not Sure
I feel concerned that some ingredients added to processed foods may be harmful or unsafe to eat	%	45	35	11	7	2
I avoid buying certain foods because I am concerned about whether they are safe	%	44	29	14	13	1
I pay a good deal of attention to the list of ingredients on food labels	%	42	33	16	9	1

Ratings of Supermarket Services

Although consumers demand a rather wide range of services from supermarkets, most shoppers believe that supermarkets have achieved a high level of performance in these areas. Consumers who feel that supermarkets are responsible for each of the eleven services shown in Table 8 were asked to rate their own supermarket on the job it does in providing that service. The services receiving the highest ratings this year are providing a wide variety of items for "one-stop" shopping (96 percent say that their supermarkets do an excellent or pretty good job of this), making shopping easier and more pleasurable (94 percent), making sure that customers receive good service from supermarket employees, and ensuring that customers buy fresh, unspoiled products (93 percent each). The service receiving the weakest rating is providing nutrition and health information, and even so, 74 percent of shoppers who feel supermarkets are responsible for providing this information say that their store is doing an excellent or pretty good job of it.

It is interesting to note that older shoppers, especially those 65 and older, tend to give supermarkets higher marks on their performance than do younger shoppers. On services widely considered to be of special concern to shoppers with a limited income—money saving specials and helping to pick the best value for the money—shoppers 65 and over are more likely than any other age group to report that their supermarkets do an excellent or pretty good job.

For comparison of how men, women, and working women differ in their ratings of supermarket performance, see Chapter VI.

Table 12 **Shoppers Rate Supermarket Services**

Base: Shoppers Who Feel Supermarkets Are Responsible For Each Item

Q.: Do you feel that the supermarket in which you usually shop does an excellent, pretty good, not very good, or poor job of (READ EACH ITEM)?

		Age				
	Total	18-24 Years	25-39 Years	40-49 Years	50-64 Years	65 And Over
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Supermarkets do an excellent or pretty good job of:						
Helping you by having a wide variety of items for "one-stop" shopping	96	95	94	97	97	98
Making shopping easier and more pleasurable	94	92	93	97	95	96
Making sure you don't buy old, stale, or spoiled products	93	93	93	94	94	93
Making sure their employees give good service to their customers	93	80	92	95	96	97
Keeping your favorite products in stock	92	89	89	91	95	96
Helping you save your money with their specials	91	86	87	92	93	98
Helping you pick the best value for the money	89	81	87	90	88	96
Providing you with cheaper house brands or unbranded products	88	81	86	90	90	92
Getting you through checkout quickly	85	85	80	90	85	93
Having readable and accurate shelf tags	85	86	85	84	87	86
Providing nutrition and health information	74	80	64	74	84	86

Chapter III: Saving Time and Money

Methods of Economizing

When shopping at the supermarket, consumers economize on their food bills today in the same ways as they have in the past. The four economizing measures used by the largest number of shoppers are:

- Stocking up when you find a good bargain (76 percent);
- Making more use of price-off coupons (73 percent);
- Buying more store brands and lower price brands (72 percent);
- Buying products on special even if you hadn't planned to buy them that day (68 percent).

There has been almost no change since last year in the number of shoppers using each of these methods.

In the area of meal planning and preparation, most consumers say that they are doing more with leftovers (79 percent), and many are doing more meal planning (66 percent) and more baking, canning, and freezing (53 percent) in order to save money. In addition, slightly over half of all shoppers (52 percent) say that they are eating out less often in an effort to economize on their food bills.

Three common economizing measures showed a decrease in usage this year: buying fewer luxury, snack items is down 9 percentage points from last year (66 to 57 percent); buying in larger quantity is down 8 points from last year (55 to 47 percent), and buying less meat is down 7 points from last year (58 to 51 percent).

Table 13

Methods Of Economizing In Shopping And In Home Meal Planning And Preparation: 1974-1982

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: I'm going to read you some things that people have told us they do to economize on their food bills. For each one, please tell me whether this is something that you've been doing for a few years and are continuing to do now to economize, something that you've just begun to do recently, something you may do later, or something that doesn't apply to you.

	Total					
	Nov. 1974	Mar. 1978	Feb. 1980	Jan. 1981	Jan. 1982	Net Difference 1974-1982
	%	%	%	%	%	
Been doing or recently begun:						
Shopping						
Stocking up when you find a good bargain	67	70	77	79	76	+9
Making more use of price-off coupons	66	65	70	76	73	+7
Buying more store brands and lower price brands	77	70	73	71	72	-5
Buying products on special even if you hadn't planned to buy them that day	x	63	65	68	68	x
Buying fewer luxury, snack items	75	67	72	66	57	-18
Buying less meat	58	43	61	58	51	-7
Buying in larger quantity*	55	54	59	55	47	-8
Buying cheaper cuts of meat	59	47	60	52	49	-10
Buying fewer convenience foods	64	58	x	x	46	-18
Buying only what's on your list	x	x	x	x	49	x
Meal planning and preparation						
Doing more with leftovers	75	74	77	79	79	+4
Doing more meal planning	63	65	68	67	66	+3
Doing more baking, canning, and freezing	48	51	54	56	53	+5
Eating out less often	x	x	x	x	52	x

*Prior to 1981, was worded: "Buy in quantity if cheaper."

x = Not asked.

As far as further cutbacks in food bills are concerned, shoppers who have been using these various measures for a few years do see some room for greater economizing, if necessary. Although half or more of the shoppers in this group say that they now have economized as much as possible with each of these methods, many feel they could economize more if they had to. For example, 49 percent say they could economize more by making greater use of price-off coupons, 48 percent by doing more baking, canning, and freezing, and 46 percent by providing fewer luxury, snack items.

The measures that shoppers are least likely to make greater use of such as doing more with leftovers (30 percent), buying cheaper cuts of meat (31 percent), and buying more store brands and lower price brands (35 percent), are also those measures in which shoppers feel they economized as much as they can.

Table 14

Areas In Which Shoppers Feel They Could Economize More If They Had To

Base: Shoppers Who Have Been Using Each Method Of Economizing For A Few Years

Q.: Do you personally feel that you've economized about as much as you can by (READ EACH ITEM) or do you feel that you could economize more if you had to?

	Base		Could Economize More	Economized As Much As Can	Not Sure
Making more use of price-off coupons	553	%	49	49	2
Doing more baking, canning, and freezing	435	%	48	51	1
Buying fewer luxury, snack items	411	%	46	53	1
Doing more meal planning	526	%	44	55	1
Buying fewer convenience foods	353	%	44	55	2
Buying products on special even if you hadn't planned to buy them that day	576	%	42	56	1
Eating out less often	361	%	41	57	2
Buying in larger quantity	385	%	40	59	1
Stocking up when you find a good bargain	648	%	38	60	1
Buying less meat	357	%	36	63	1
Buying only what's on your list	443	%	36	63	1
Buying more store brands and lower price brands	541	%	35	64	1
Buying cheaper cuts of meat	391	%	31	67	1
Doing more with leftovers	712	%	30	69	1

Who are the Heavy Economizers?

In an effort to better understand the economy-conscious segment of the shopping population, this year's Trends created for the purposes of analysis a subgroup called "Heavy Economizers." Included in this group are shoppers who have used for a few years, and are currently using, eight or more of the fourteen methods of economizing discussed earlier (see Table 13). In all, 14 percent of shoppers were identified as Heavy Economizers.

The most economy-conscious shoppers are:

- Nonworking women;
- Shoppers 65 and older;
- Families of two or more;
- Shoppers who spend $40 or less a week on groceries.

Analysis of the Heavy Economizers and how they compare with other groups in their views and shopping behavior appears throughout this chapter and in Chapter VI.

Table 15 **Who Are The Heavy Economizers?**

Base: The Shopping Public

	Base		Heavy Economizers
Total	1003	%	14
Sex			
Men	405	%	13
Women	598	%	15
Principal shoppers			
Women	715	%	14
Working	292	%	11
Nonworking	299	%	17
Married			
One spouse at home	448	%	19
Two wage earners	276	%	12
Type of family			
With children	426	%	15
No children	563	%	14
Size of family			
1	137	%	6
2	357	%	16
3-4	333	%	16
5 or more	133	%	14
Age			
18-24 years	73	%	5
25-39 years	385	%	14
40-49 years	148	%	13
50-64 years	267	%	15
65 and over	123	%	20
Income			
$7,500 or less	111	%	14
$7,501-15,000	165	%	17
$15,001-25,000	265	%	15
$25,001-and over	233	%	10
Weekly food shopping basket			
$40 or less	301	%	17
$41-60	253	%	14
$61-100	311	%	12
$101 and over	89	%	13

Frequency of Economizing

This year shoppers were asked how often they use supermarket specials, coupons, and price comparisons. Almost two-thirds of all shoppers (65 percent) look for grocery specials in the newspaper pretty much every time they shop or fairly often, and more than half (59 percent) use price-off coupons that frequently. All of the Heavy Economizers (100 percent) look in the paper for specials pretty much every time they shop. In general, men, whether principal shoppers or not, are the least likely to economize in this way when shopping.

Another economizing strategy used by many consumers is comparing prices. Almost half (48 percent) of shoppers compare prices at different supermarkets pretty much every time they shop or fairly often, and among Heavy Economizers this figure is an almost unanimous 96 percent. When it comes to taking advantage of specials, consumers in general remain loyal to their principal supermarkets; while two-thirds (66 percent) go to supermarkets other than their principal one for advertised specials only occasionally or never, only one-third (33 percent) do this pretty much every time they shop or fairly often. However, among the Heavy Economizers price-consciousness takes precedence over loyalty; 57 percent go to other supermarkets for advertised specials pretty much every time they shop.

Table 16 **How Often Shoppers Use Supermarket Specials, Coupons, and Price Comparisons**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: How often do you (READ EACH ITEM)—pretty much every time you shop, fairly often, only occasionally, or never?

Base: 1003		Pretty Much Every Time	Fairly Often	Only Occasionally	Never	Not Sure
Look in the newspaper for grocery specials	%	50	15	21	14	*
Use price-off coupons	%	39	20	28	12	*
Compare prices at different supermarkets	%	32	16	29	23	*
Go to supermarkets other than your principal one for advertised specials	%	16	17	43	23	1

*Less than 0.5%.

Table 17 **Differences Among Key Subgroups in Frequency of Economizing**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: How often do you (READ EACH ITEM)—pretty much every time you shop, fairly often, only occasionally, or never?

		Principal Shoppers		Heavy
	Total	Men	Women	Economizers
Base	1003	190	525	140
	%	%	%	%
Pretty much every time:				
Look in the newspapers for grocery specials	50	34	52	100
Use price-off coupons	39	27	41	85
Compare prices at different Supermarkets	32	26	32	96
Go to supermarkets other than your principal one for advertised specials	16	12	15	57

Saving Time in the Supermarket

Consumers use a variety of strategies to save time when grocery shopping. The time-saving methods that at least half of the shoppers use consistently, that is, pretty much every time they shop or fairly often, are:

- Looking only at those items they know they need (61 percent);
- Taking the prepackaged meat available rather than asking for a different cut (52 percent);
- Going to the supermarket at a particular time of day to avoid crowds (50 percent);
- Buying larger quantities to avoid frequent shopping (50 percent).

Once again shoppers indicate their need for quick and efficient checkout lines; nearly 4 in 10 shoppers (39 percent) report that to save time they frequently shop at a particular supermarket because it has a better or faster checkout system, and 14 percent say that they buy only enough to use the quick checkout line pretty much every time they shop or fairly often.

Only 9 percent of shoppers save time by shopping in a convenience store rather than in a supermarket.

Table 18 **How Shoppers Save Time in The Supermarket**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: People do different things to save time when shopping. For each of the following, please tell me how often you personally do this to save time when grocery shopping. Do you (READ EACH ITEM) pretty much every time you shop, fairly often, only occasionally, or never?

Base: 1003		Pretty Much Every Time	Fairly Often	Only Occasionally	Never	Doesn't Apply (Vol.)	Not Sure
Take packaged meat available rather than ask for a different cut	%	36	16	26	17	5	*
Look only at the items you know you need	%	36	25	26	12	*	*
Go to the supermarket to a particular time of day to avoid crowd	%	30	20	27	22	1	1
Buy larger quantities to avoid frequent shopping	%	29	21	31	17	1	1
Shop at a particular supermarket because it has a better or faster checkout system	%	22	17	19	36	4	1
Shop at a particular supermarket because it's less crowded	%	16	13	22	43	5	1
Buy packaged fruits and vegetables rather than bothering to have them weighed	%	14	10	40	32	3	1
Buy certain brands because they're more visible and easier to find	%	11	11	34	41	2	1
Buy only enough to use the quick checkout line	%	5	9	43	41	2	*
Go to a convenience store rather than a supermarket	%	3	6	46	43	1	1

*Less than 0.5%.

Chapter IV: Shopping Patterns

The Weekly Grocery Bill

For the second year, *Trends* asked consumers to estimate their weekly grocery expenses. Overall, shoppers estimate that they spend an average of $58 each week on groceries for the family. This figure is higher for families with children ($71) and families with two wage earners ($71).

Table 19 **Shoppers' Weekly Grocery Expenses: 1981-1982**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: About how much do you spend each week on groceries for your family?

	Jan. 1981			Jan. 1982		
	Total	Households With Children	Two Wage Earner Households	Total	Households With Children	Two Wage Earner Households
	%	%	%	%	%	%
$ 0-40	29	14	20	30	13	17
$41-60	29	28	28	25	25	25
$61-80	21	31	27	19	30	24
$81-100	10	14	14	11	14	19
$101 and over	6	11	10	8	15	12
Average weekly grocery expenses	$55	$65	$62	$58	$71	$71

This year for the first time, *Trends* also examines the average *per person* weekly grocery expenditures. While overall the average per person expenditure is $21, there are significant differences in this figure by family size, with single-person households spending an average of $33 per week and households of five or more spending an average of $17 per person. Furthermore, households with children spend less per person than do households with no children ($19 vs. $25), and male principal shoppers spend more per person than female principal shoppers ($25 vs. $21). Regionally, shoppers in the East and West (both $23) spend more per person than those in the South and Midwest (both $20), and shoppers who live in the suburbs tend to spend more per person ($23) than do those in the cities ($21), towns ($20), or rural areas ($20).

Table 20 **Average Per Person Weekly Grocery Expenses**

Base: The Shopping Public

	Base	Average per Person Weekly Grocery Bill
Total	949	$21
Principal Shoppers		
Men	182	$25
Women	493	$21
Women		
Working	281	$21
Nonworking	272	$20
Married		
One spouse at home	420	$20
Two wage earners	270	$22
Size of family		
1	122	$33
2	330	$26
3-4	327	$20
5 and over	128	$17
Type of family		
With children	415	$19
No children	521	$25
Heavy economizers	133	$19
Region		
East	255	$23
Midwest	248	$20
South	266	$20
West	180	$23
Size of Place		
Cities	268	$21
Suburbs	263	$23
Town	157	$20
Rural	261	$20

Number of Supermarkets Used and Number of Supermarket Visits in an Average Week

Most consumers (56 percent) do their weekly food shopping in only one supermarket, while one-third (34 percent) visit two different supermarkets in a week and only 9 percent visit three or more supermarkets. There has been a marked (10-point) increase in the number of shoppers visiting only one supermarket in a week, and a corresponding decrease in the number of shoppers who frequent several different supermarkets for the weekly shopping.

Table 21 **Number of Different Supermarkets Shoppers Use: 1981-1982**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: About how many different supermarkets do you usually visit in a week to do your weekly shopping?

	Total	
	Jan. 1981	Jan. 1982
	%	%
One	46	56
Two	39	34
Three	11	8
Four or more	5	1
Average number of different supermarkets visited per week	1.8	1.5

Shoppers also are making fewer visits to the supermarket in an average week. This year, 65 percent of shoppers visit the supermarket more than once a week, down from 72 percent who reported doing so last year. Overall, shoppers make an average of 2.3 trips to the supermarket each week.

Table 22 **How Often Shoppers Go To The Supermarket in an Average Week: 1981-1982**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: About how many visits do you make to the supermarket in an average week—that includes going to the same store more than once and going to different stores?

	Total	
	Jan. 1981	Jan. 1982
	%	%
One	26	31
Two	33	32
Three	21	20
Four	8	7
Five	4	3
Six or more	6	3
Every 2 weeks	1	1
Average Number of trips per week	2.6	2.3

Shopping Hours

Nearly equal numbers of consumers say they usually shop in the morning (27 percent), afternoon (28 percent), and early evening (26 percent). Since a year ago, consumer preferences in shopping hours have shifted slightly, away from the morning and toward afternoon and early evening. The number of shoppers who prefer morning hours has dropped 4 percentage points, while the number who prefer afternoon or early evening has increased 8 points. Noontime and late evening continue to be the least preferred shopping hours, with only 6 percent of shoppers reporting that they usually shop at those times.

Table 23 **Time of Day Shoppers Usually Go to Supermarkets: 1981-1982**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: At what time of day do you usually go—in the morning, around noon, in the afternoon, early evening, or late evening?

	Total	
	Jan. 1981	Jan. 1982
	%	%
Morning	31	27
Noon	6	6
Afternoon	25	28
Early Evening	21	26
Late Evening	6	6
No Special Time (Vol.)	9	8

Supermarkets vs. Other Stores

When asked about the kinds of stores they commonly visit to purchase various types of foods and other products, a good number of consumers indicate that they shop in supermarkets for a wide variety of items.

At the supermarket, large majorities of consumers purchase milk and eggs (91 percent), bread (88 percent), and soft drinks (86 percent), while those remaining divide almost equally between convenience and specialty stores. Although nearly one-quarter of shoppers (23 percent) go to discount department stores for paper goods, most (61 percent) buy their paper products at the supermarket. Supermarkets also hold a slight edge in magazines; 37 percent of shoppers buy their magazines at the supermarket rather than at an all-purpose drugstore (22 percent) or specialty store (23 percent).

However, shoppers prefer all-purpose drugstores for health and beauty aids (37 percent), greeting cards (36 percent), and prescription drugs (83 percent). Discount department stores are the clear choice for household repair and houseware items (61 percent) and automotive products (50 percent).

Table 24 **Types of Stores Consumers Usually Shop in For Various Items**

Base: Consumers Who Shop For Each Item

Q.: Please tell me where you would usually shop for each of the following items—a supermarket, a convenience store, an all-purpose drugstore, or a discount department store?

	Base		Super-market	Conve-nience Store	All-Purpose Drug-store	Discount Depart-ment Store	Other
Milk and eggs	996	%	91	3	1	1	4
Bread	995	%	88	4	*	2	6
Soft Drinks	923	%	86	6	1	4	3
Paper goods	992	%	61	2	8	23	4
Magazines	789	%	37	6	22	10	23
Health and beauty aids	962	%	23	2	37	31	7
Greeting cards	959	%	12	5	36	27	19
Household repair and houseware items	960	%	10	5	2	61	19
Automotive products	897	%	5	4	2	50	33
Prescription drugs	979	%	4	*	83	7	5

*Less than 0.5%.

CHAPTER V: CONSUMER ACTIVISM

General Consumer Activism

In general, consumers continue to indicate an unwillingness to take any overt actions on their complaints. Actions such as writing letters to congressmen, getting neighbors to sign petitions, and joining organized consumer boycotts against particular products or stores continue to decline in popularity. Indeed, 1 in 4 consumers (21 percent) think that joining an organized boycott is ineffective, wrong, or illegal. Since 1974, the number of consumers willing to write letters to their congressman demanding that the government do something has dropped 23 percentage points (from 68 percent in 1974 to 45 percent in 1982), the number willing to get neighbors to sign petitions has dropped 11 points (from 44 to 33 percent), and the number willing to join consumer boycotts also has dropped 11 points (from 38 to 27 percent).

The one action that most (85 percent) consumers are willing to take is refusing to buy products that cost too much. The number of consumers willing to conduct this kind of personal boycott is up 5 percentage points from last year and shows only a slight decline in popularity since 1974 (down 4 points).

Table 25 **Consumers' Views on Taking Different Actions on Their Complaints**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: How do you personally feel about (READ EACH ITEM)? Is this something you already have done, something you are ready to do, something you can sympathize with but wouldn't do, or something you think is ineffective, wrong, or illegal?

BASE: 1003		Already Have Done	Ready To Do	Sympathize With But Wouldn't Do	Ineffective, Wrong, Or Illegal	Not Sure
Refusing to buy products which cost too much	%	77	8	9	3	4
Writing letters to your congressman demanding that the government do something	%	17	28	33	16	6
Getting neighbors to sign petitions	%	14	19	43	15	9
Joining organized consumer boycotts against particular products or stores	%	8	19	44	21	8

Table 26 **Actions That Consumers Are Willing To Take: 1974-1982**

Base: THE SHOPPING PUBLIC

Q.: How do you personally feel about (READ EACH ITEM)? Is this something you already have done, something you are ready to do, something you can sympathize with but wouldn't do, or something you think is ineffective, wrong, or illegal?

	Total						
	Nov. 1974	Apr. 1977	Mar. 1978	Feb. 1980	Jan. 1981	Jan. 1982	Net Difference 1974-1982
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Already have done or ready to do:							
Refusing to buy products which cost too much	89	82	74	86	80	85	-4
Writing letters to your congressman demanding that the government do something	68	66	54	65	50	45	-23
Getting neighbors to sign petitions	44	48	39	50	33	33	-11
Joining organized consumer boycotts against particular products or stores	38	38	24	36	27	27	-11

Supermarket-Related Activism

The decline in general consumer activism is reflected in a decline in supermarket-related activism. While a significant number of shoppers returned products for a refund or exchange in the past year (53 percent) and about one-third made an in-person complaint to a food store or supermarket manager (33 percent), the number of shoppers who say they have taken these actions in the past year has declined since 1981 (down 4 and 8 percentage points, respectively). Even more significant, the number of shoppers who have switched supermarkets in the past year because they were dissatisfied has declined 12 points (from 34 to 22 percent), and the number of shoppers who told a friend or neighbor to stop going to a particular store or supermarket is down 9 points (from 22 to 13 percent).

Table 27 **Actions Shoppers Have Taken on Supermarket-related Complaints: 1981-1982**

Base: The shopping Public

Q.: In the past year, have you (READ EACH ITEM), or not?

	Total	
	Jan. 1981	Jan. 1982
	%	%
Returned products to a supermarket for a refund or exchange	57	53
Made an in-person complaint to a food store or supermarket manager	41	33
Switched supermarkets because you were dissatisfied	34	22
Told a friend or neighbor to stop going to a particular store or supermarket	22	13
Written a letter of complaint to a food manufacturer or supermarket	8	7
Joined a food co-op in your area	4	2

Who Are the Most Activist Consumers?

Another special subgroup created for closer examination in this year's Trends is "Activist Consumers." Included in this group are shoppers who have already taken six or more of the general and supermarket-related actions discussed above (see Tables 25-27). In all, 5 percent of the shoppers were identified as belonging to this group.*

The most activist consumers are:

- Working women;
- Those in two-member families;
- Shoppers 25-39 years old;
- Shoppers who spend more than $100 per week on groceries.

Analysis of the Activist Consumers and how they compare with other groups in their views and shopping behavior appears throughout this chapter and in Chapter VI.

* In a survey conducted by Louis Harris and Associates for Sentry Insurance in 1977, *Consumerism at the Crossroads*, 5 percent of the U.S. population were also classified as consumer activists.

Table 28 **Who are the Most Activist Consumers?**

Base: The Shopping Public

	Base		Activist Consumers
Total	1003		5
Sex			
Men	405	%	4
Women	598	%	5
Principal shoppers	715	%	4
Women			
Working	292	%	7
Nonworking	299	%	3
Married			
One spouse at home	448	%	4
Two wage earners	276	%	5
Type of family			
With children	426	%	4
No children	563	%	3
Size of family			
1	137	%	2
2	357	%	6
3-4	333	%	4
5 and over	133	%	4
Age			
18-24	73	%	6
25-39	385	%	7
40-49	148	%	3
50-64	267	%	2
65 and over	123	%	3
Income			
$7,500 or less	111	%	1
$7,501-$15,000	165	%	8
$15,001-$25,000	265	%	5
$25,001 and over	333	%	6
Weekly food shopping basket			
$40 or less	301	%	6
$41-60	253	%	5
$61-100	311	%	4
$101 and over	84	%	7

Supermarket Complaint Handling

Among shoppers in general, a majority have not had a complaint about their supermarket or about something they bought in their supermarket in the past year. While 41 percent overall have had a complaint, among principal shoppers the proportion is a little higher for men (45 percent compared with 41 percent). Nearly 9 out of 10 Activist Consumers (87 percent) have had a complaint in the past year.

It should be noted that the 41 percent who "had" a complaint is larger than the 33 percent who actually "made an in-person complaint" (Table 27), because to "have" a complaint is a measure of consumer dissatisfaction whether or not action was taken.

Table 29 **Number of Shoppers Who Have Had a Complaint About Their Supermarket in the Past Year**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: In the past year have you had a complaint about your supermarket or about something you bought in your supermarket, or not?

	Base		Yes, Have Had A Complaint	No, Haven't Had A Complaint	Not Sure
Total	1001	%	41	58	1
Principal shoppers					
Total	713	%	41	58	1
Men	190	%	45	55	1
Women	523	%	41	59	1
Activist consumers	47	%	87	13	-

Among shoppers who have had a complaint, the one mentioned most frequently was about stale or spoiled products (65 percent). Very few shoppers in this group had complaints about out-of-stock items (2 percent), out-of-date products (5 percent), or slow checkout service in their supermarket (4 percent).

Table 30 **Kinds of Complaints Shoppers Have Made to Their Supermarket**

Base: Shoppers who Have Had a Complaint About Their Supermarket or a Product

Q.: What was the nature of your complaint?

		Principal Shoppers		Activists
	Total	Men	Women	Consumers
Base	411	85	205	41
	%	%	%	%
Stale/spoiled products	65	56	67	79
Defective products	11	11	10	1
Out-of-date products	5	8	5	6
Slow checkout/service	4	6	3	-
Out-of-stock items	2	7	1	-
Advertised special not available	1	1	1	3
Other	14	15	14	15
Not sure	2	-	2	-

Overall, most shoppers who made a complaint about their supermarket or about a product say they were satisfied with how their complaint was handled (83 percent). Virtually all shoppers who complained about out-of-date products (97 percent), defective products (94 percent), or stale or spoiled products (92 percent) were satisfied with the response they received. On the other hand, shoppers who made other kinds of complaints were significantly less satisfied with how their complaints were handled: 78 percent of those complaining about advertised specials not being available were satisfied with the response; 40 percent of those who complained about slow checkout or service were satisfied; and only 8 percent of shoppers who complained about out-of-stock items feel that their complaint received a satisfactory response.

Table 31 **Shoppers' Reactions to How Specific Complaints are Handled**

Base: Shoppers Who Have Made a Complaint About Their Supermarket or a Product

Q.: What was the nature of your complaint?

Q.: How satisfied were you with the response to your complaint—were you very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?

			Reaction to Complaint Handling		
	Base		Very and Somewhat Satisfied	Very and Somewhat Dissatisfied	Still Waiting For Action
Total	369	%	83	16	1
Complained about:					
Out-of-date products	20	%	97	3	-
Defective products	45	%	94	6	-
Stale/spoiled products	267	%	92	8	1
Advertised special not available	4	%	78	22	-
Slow checkout/service	16	%	40	54	6
Out-of-stock items	8	%	8	92	-

Supermarket personnel receive high marks from shoppers on their ability to handle complaints. Shoppers who complained to a store owner (93 percent) or checkout person (94 percent) were the most satisfied with the response to their complaint, followed by those who complained to a department manager (88 percent). Food manufacturers and store headquarters score the lowest on complaint handling, with 54 and 75 percent of those who complained to them reporting that they were satisfied with the response; moreover, 25 percent of those who complained to food manufacturers are still waiting for action on their complaint.

Table 32 **Shoppers' Reactions to How Store Headquarters, Food Manufacturers, and Store Managers and Owners Handle Complaints**

Base: Shoppers Who Have Made a Complaint about Their Supermarket or a Product

Q.: To whom did you make your complaint?

Q.: How satisfied were you with the response to your complaint—were you very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?

			Reaction to Complaint Handling		
	Base		Very and Somewhat Satisfied	Very and Somewhat Dissatisfied	Still Waiting For Action
Total	369	%	83	16	1
Complained to:					
Checkout person	58	%	94	4	2
Store owner	8	%	93	7	-
Department manager (e.g., meat or produce department)	46	%	88	12	-
Supermarket manager	208	%	79	20	1
Store headquarters (public relations, store executives, consumer affairs)	12	%	75	25	-
Food manufacturer	12	%	54	22	25

Chapter VI: A Comparison of Key Groups in the Shopping Public

Views of Supermarket Responsibilities

In general, men and women (whether principal shoppers or not) and working and nonworking women tend to agree on the responsibilities and most important services for a supermarket to provide. Some noteworthy exceptions are that more women than men feel that supermarkets are responsible for providing money-saving specials (80 vs. 70 percent) and for providing cheaper house brands (81 vs. 73 percent), while men are more likely to feel that supermarkets should help shoppers pick the best value for their money (54 vs. 48 percent) and provide "one-stop" shopping (85 vs. 80 percent). Interestingly, more male than female principal shoppers feel that supermarkets should provide health and nutrition information (40 vs. 33 percent). Furthermore, among male principal shoppers, providing quality products is the service mentioned fourth most frequently among the most important services their supermarket can provide, while among women principal shoppers it is eighth on the list of most important services.

Among women, significantly more working than nonworking women think that supermarkets are responsible for ensuring that customers don't buy old, stale, or spoiled products (96 vs. 86 percent) and feel that having a wide variety and selection of products (31 vs. 21 percent) and a fast checkout (36 vs. 25 percent) are among the most important services a supermarket can provide.

While having good prices for products is named most frequently by all groups as an important service, it is mentioned more often by Heavy Economizers (40 percent), Activist Consumers (48 percent), and working women (36 percent).

Table 33 **How Men, Women, and Working Women Compare in Their Views of Supermarket Responsibilities**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: Do you feel that supermarkets are responsible for (READ EACH ITEM) or don't you feel that's their job?

			Women			Principal Shoppers		
	Total	Men	Total	Working	Non-working	Total	Men	Women
Base	1003	405	598	292	299	715	190	525
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Supermarkets are responsible for:								
Making sure their employees give good service to their customers	98	96	98	99	98	98	96	98
Getting you through checkout quickly	97	95	97	98	96	97	95	97
Having readable and accurate shelf tags	95	93	95	95	95	94	92	95
Making sure you don't buy old, stale, or spoiled products	90	88	91	96	86	90	86	91
Making shopping easier and more pleasurable	90	87	90	89	92	90	85	90
Keeping your favorite products in stock	88	86	89	89	89	89	86	90
Helping you by having a wide variety of items for "one-stop" shopping	81	85	80	79	81	80	83	80
Providing you with cheaper house brands or unbranded products	79	73	81	83	79	80	76	81
Helping you save your money with their specials	78	70	80	78	81	78	70	79
Helping you pick the best value for the money	49	54	48	44	51	47	54	46
Providing nutrition and health information	34	34	34	33	34	34	40	33

Table 34 **How Different Groups Compare on the Most Important Services Supermarkets can Provide**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: What do you think are the two or three most important services your supermarket can provide? What size?

		Women		Principal Shoppers				
Base	Total	Working	Non-working	Total	Men	Women	Heavy Economizers	Activist Consumers
	1002	292	298	714	190	524	140	47
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Good prices, low prices	33	36	28	33	35	33	40	48
Fast checkout	30	36	25	29	31	28	36	24
Variety, wide selection of products	27	31	21	27	24	27	27	28
Courteous/friendly employees	18	20	18	19	12	19	19	24
Good service	18	16	19	18	15	18	17	20
Clean store, cleanliness	15	19	13	16	14	17	9	8
Keep shelves well stocked	15	18	13	15	12	16	12	19
Quality products	15	12	16	15	21	14	14	17
Fresh products	13	17	10	13	15	13	11	14
Fresh produce/fruits and vegetables	12	9	15	12	12	11	11	10
Items on sale, money saving specials	10	10	10	10	7	10	14	18
Items well marked/clearly marked for price	8	11	7	9	8	9	10	11
Good meat/better meat, fresh meat	8	7	9	8	9	8	8	4
Grocery carryout service	4	3	5	4	1	5	7	-
Better store hours, longer hours	2	2	2	2	3	2	1	1
Having advertised items in stock	2	1	2	2	3	2	5	1
No old/stale products	2	1	2	2	1	2	1	-
Coupons	1	1	2	1	-	2	1	-

As might be expected, in the area of food safety, Activist Consumers are more likely than shoppers in general to agree that supermarkets should refuse to carry allegedly unsafe products (90 vs. 84 percent) and to agree that products should carry cautionary labels for allegedly unsafe ingredients (99 vs. 94 percent). Even more significantly, while three-quarters of all shoppers (75 percent) pay a good deal of attention to the ingredients listed on food labels, virtually all Activist Consumers (94 percent) and Heavy Economizers (91 percent) say that they do this, and 87 percent of Activist Consumers and 81 percent of Heavy Economizers, compared with 73 percent of all shoppers, avoid buying certain foods because of concern over whether they are safe.

Table 35 **The Most Activist Consumers' Views on Food Safety**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly.

		Activitist Consumers		All Shoppers	
Base		47		1003	
		Agree Strongly/ Somewhat	Disagree Strongly/ Somewhat	Agree Strongly/ Somewhat	Disagree Strongly/ Somewhat
The food in supermarkets is safe to eat	%	85	15	89	9
Supermarkets should refuse to carry allegedly unsafe products	%	90	9	84	13
Products should carry cautionary lables for allegedly unsafe ingredients	%	99	-	94	4

Q.: The following are statements that other people have made. For each one, please tell me how close it comes to describing you—very close, somewhat close, not very close, or not at all.

		Activist Consumers	Heavy Economizers	All Shoppers
Base		47	140	1003
		Very Close/ Somewhat Close	Very Close/ Somewhat Close	Very Close Somewhat Close
I pay a good deal of attention to the list of ingredients on food labels	%	94	91	75
I feel concerned that some ingredients added to processed foods may be harmful or unsafe to eat	%	89	91	80
I avoid buying certain foods because I am concerned about whether they are safe	%	87	81	73

Shopping Habits

Although in general men, women, and working women tend to have similar shopping habits for various types of products, there are some differences worth noting. Among principal shoppers, men are more likely than women to go to a convenience store for milk and eggs (7 vs. 3 percent), bread (8 vs. 3 percent), soft drinks (12 vs 4 percent), and magazines (13 vs. 5 percent). However, among principal shoppers, men are much more likely than women to purchase health and beauty aids in a supermarket (32 vs. 21 percent).

Table 36 **Items that Men, Women, and Working Women Usually Shop for in Supermarket**

Base: Consumers Who Shop for Each Item

Q.: Please tell me where you would usually shop for each of the following items—a supermarket, a convenience store, an all-purpose drug store, or a discount department store?

			Women			Principal Shoppers		
	Total	Men	Total	Working	Non-working	Total	Men	Women
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Milk and eggs	91	88	92	91	92	91	87	92
Bread	88	85	89	91	87	89	84	89
Soft drinks	86	82	86	85	87	86	79	87
Paper goods	61	58	62	63	61	61	58	62
Magazines	37	32	39	42	35	38	32	39
Health and beauty aids	23	31	21	23	19	23	32	21
Greeting cards	12	12	12	11	13	12	12	12
Household repair and houseware items	10	7	11	12	11	11	8	12
Automotive products	5	5	5	6	5	6	6	6
Prescription drugs	5	5	4	3	5	5	5	5

As far as saving time in the supermarket is concerned, there are minor differences in the degree to which men, women, and working women use each of a variety of time-saving strategies. However, in general, more men and nonworking women than working women tend to use time-saving measures in the supermarket.

Table 37 **How Different Groups Save Time in the Supermarket**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: How often do you personally do the following to save time when grocery shopping?

		Women		Principal Shoppers				
	Total	Working	Non-working	Total	Men	Women	Heavy Economizers	Activist Consumers
	1003	292	299	715	190	525	140	47
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Pretty much every time:								
Look only at the items you know you need	36	34	37	35	39	35	48	49
Take packaged meat available rather than ask for a different cut	36	36	34	36	38	36	33	21
Go to the supermarket at a particular time of day to avoid crowds	30	27	34	30	35	30	33	39
Buy larger quantities to avoid frequent shopping	29	30	27	28	26	29	33	37
Shop at a particular supermarket because it has a better or faster checkout system	22	18	24	22	24	21	14	31
Shop at a particular supermarket because it's less crowded	16	12	19	15	19	15	9	21
Buy packaged fruits and vegetables rather than bothering to have them weighed	14	12	15	14	19	14	15	6
Buy certain brands because they're more visible and easier to find	11	8	13	11	15	10	10	5
Buy only enough to use the the quick checkout line	5	4	5	6	14	4	5	-
Go to a convenience store rather than a supermarket	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	-

Men and women shoppers also differ slightly both in the number of visits to the supermarket in an average week and in the number of different supermarkets visited each week. Men and nonworking women are more likely than working women to use three or more different supermarkets for their weekly shopping (12 and 11 percent vs. 7 percent), while working women are more likely to visit just one supermarket a week (59 percent) than are nonworking women (56 percent) or men (49 percent). Even more significantly, Heavy Economizers visit an average of 1.9 different supermarkets per week, compared with an overall average of 1.5.

Table 38 **How Many Different Supermarkets Men, Women, and Working Women Use**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: About how many different supermarkets do you usually visit in a week to do your weekly shopping?

			Women			Principal Shoppers			
	Total	Men	Total	Working	Non-working	Total	Men	Women	Heavy Economizers
Base	997	402	595	290	298	709	187	522	140
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
One	56	49	57	59	56	58	59	58	32
Two	34	38	33	33	32	32	28	33	43
Three	8	11	8	6	10	7	11	7	20
Four	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	4
Average number of different supermarkets visited per week	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.9

Overall, men (72 percent) are most likely to visit supermarkets more than once a week, while working women and women principal shoppers are least likely to do so (64 percent each).

Table 39 **How Different Groups Compare in Number of Supermarket Visits in an Average Week**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: How many visits do you make to the supermarket in an average week—that includes going to the same store more than once and going to different stores?

			Women			Principal Shoppers			
	Total	Men	Total	Working	Non-working	Total	Men	Women	Heavy Economizers
Base	997	402	595	290	298	709	187	522	140
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
One	31	27	33	33	32	34	31	34	39
Two	32	37	31	32	31	31	37	30	29
Three	20	20	20	19	21	20	18	21	18
Four	7	7	7	8	7	6	5	7	4
Five	3	4	3	3	4	3	3	3	4
Six or more	3	4	3	2	4	3	4	3	3
Once every two weeks	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	4
Other	1	*	1	1	*	1	-	1	-
Average number of visits made in an average week	2.2	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.1

*Less than 0.5%.

Nonworking women tend to shop during the morning (39 percent), while only 17 percent of working women and 19 percent of men usually shop at that time. Among men and working women, early evening is the most popular shopping time (34 and 36 percent, respectively). Late evening shopping attracts more men (9 percent), male principal shoppers (11 percent), and working women (8 percent) than it does nonworking women (4 percent). Nonworking women are the most likely to have no special time preference for grocery shopping.

Table 40 **Shopping Hours Preferred by Men, Women, and Working Women**

Base: The Shopping Public

Q.: What time of day do you usually go—in the evening, around noon, in the afternoon, early evening, or late evening?

			Women			Principal Shoppers		
	Total	Men	Total	Working	Non-working	Total	Men	Women
Base	1003	405	598	292	299	715	190	525
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Morning	27	19	28	17	39	28	22	29
Noon	5	5	6	6	5	6	4	6
Afternoon	27	26	28	28	27	29	27	30
Early evening	26	34	24	36	13	23	29	22
Late evening	7	9	6	8	4	7	11	6
No special time*	8	8	8	5	11	7	7	7

Methodology

Selection of the Sample

The data for this survey were collected from 1,003 telephone interviews conducted from January 17 through 26, 1982. The sample was drawn from the civilian adult population of the United States 18 years of age and older. Households contacted for the survey were selected by a procedure known as random digit dialing (RDD). This procedure ensures the inclusion of individuals with unlisted or not yet listed telephone numbers as well as those with listed numbers, and thus provides a sample that reflects the total U.S. population.

Each household selected by the RDD procedure was screened first for the head of the household (either male or female) and then for recent experience with shopping for groceries. Only heads of household who shopped for groceries in the previous two weeks were interviewed for the survey.

The final sample was controlled to consist of 60 percent female heads of household and 40 percent male heads of household in order to increase the reliability of the male shopper samples. However, the sample was weighted to a 79 percent female-21 percent male ratio to maintain comparability with previous studies in the Trends series.

Profiles of the total sample and of key subgroups follow.

Table 41 **Demographic Profile of Supermarket Shoppers**

Base: The Shopping Public

	Number In Sample	Unweighted Percentage In Sample	Weighted Percentage In Sample
		%	%
Total	1003	100	100
Sex			
Men	405	40	21
Women	598	60	79
*Principal Shoppers**			
Total	715	71	79
Men	190	19	10
Women	525	52	70
Type of Household			
With children	426	42	45
Two wage earners	276	28	27
Age			
18-24 years	73	7	7
25-39 years	385	38	38
40-49 years	148	15	15
50-64 years	267	27	27
65 and over	123	12	12
Income			
$7,500 or less	111	11	12
$7,501-15,000	165	16	16
$15,001-25,000	265	26	26
$25,001 and over	333	33	32
Race			
White	503	50	50
Black	139	14	15
Hispanic	361	36	36
Marital Status			
Single	125	12	10
Married	725	72	74
Separated/divorced/widowed	148	14	15

Table 41 (continued)

Education			
High school or less	564	56	59
Some college and college graduate	433	43	40
Size of place			
City	285	28	27
Suburb	277	28	27
Town	165	16	18
Rural	276	28	28
*Region***			
East	265	26	27
Midwest	264	26	26
South	289	29	30
West	185	18	17

*Principal shoppers are those respondents who identified themselves as being the person in their household principally responsible for the weekly food shopping.

***East includes:* Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and West Virginia.

Midwest includes: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

South includes: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

West includes: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Note: Percentages may add up to less than 100% because of nonresponse.

Table 42 **Demographic Profiles of Key Subgroups**

Base: The Shopping Public

		Men		Women			Type of Household	
	Total	Total	Principal Shoppers	Total	Working	Non Working	With Children	Two Wage Earners
Base	1003 %	405 %	190 %	598 %	292 %	299 %	426 %	276 %
Age								
18-24 years	7	8	8	7	6	7	6	5
25-39 years	38	40	42	37	46	28	60	47
40-49 years	15	14	12	16	21	10	20	26
50-64 years	27	24	21	28	26	30	12	21
65 and over	12	13	16	12	1	22	2	*
Income								
$ 7,500 or less	12	9	14	13	7	18	16	2
$ 7,501-15,000	16	17	19	16	17	15	18	8
$15,001-25,000	26	29	29	25	27	23	23	25
$25,001 and over	32	37	27	31	42	21	28	58
Not sure/refused	(14)	(8)	(11)	(15)	(7)	(23)	(15)	(7)
Race								
White	50	51	50	49	49	49	47	51
Black	15	12	16	15	17	15	12	17
Hispanic	36	37	34	35	34	37	41	32
Family size								
1	13	16	32	12	13	12	-	-
2	35	38	33	34	28	39	4	29
3-4	34	31	23	35	42	28	66	51
5 and over	14	11	7	15	12	18	30	14
Education								
High school or less	59	53	60	63	48	77	61	48
Some college and college graduate	40	13	39	37	51	23	39	52
Size of place								
City	27	33	37	25	27	24	26	22
Suburb	27	28	27	27	30	24	28	31
Town	18	13	14	19	14	24	18	15
Rural	28	26	22	28	29	27	28	32
Region								
East	27	24	27	28	29	27	27	26
Midwest	26	26	31	26	25	27	28	27
South	30	26	20	31	31	30	30	31
West	17	23	22	15	15	16	15	16

*Less than 0.5%.

Note: Percentages may add up to less than 100% because of nonresponse.

Sampling Error

It is important to note that survey results are subject to sampling error, i.e., the difference between obtained results and those that would be obtained by surveying the entire population. The size of this error varies with the size of the sample and with the percentage of respondents giving a particular answer. The following table shows the range of error for samples of four different sizes and at different percentages of response:

Sample Error (±) at 95% Confidence Level for Samples of Four Different Sizes

Percentage Response	Size of Sample			
	1000	600	400	100
	%	%	%	%
10 (90)	2.2	2.4	3	7
20 (80)	2.9	3.3	4	10
30 (70)	3.3	3.7	4.6	11
40 (60)	3.5	4	4.9	12
50	3.6	4.1	5	12

For example, if the percent response for a sample size of 1,000 is 40, in 95 cases out of 100 the response in the population will be between 36.5 percent and 43.5 percent. This figure accounts only for sampling error. Survey research is susceptible to other errors as well, such as data handling and interviewer recording. However, the procedures used by the Harris firm keep errors of this kind to a minimum.